

Smyth (A.)

A

S E R M O N

PREACHED IN 16

Christ-Church, DUBLIN,

On *Friday* the 6th of FEBRUARY, 1756,

Being the DAY appointed for a

G E N E R A L F A S T,

On Account of the late

DREADFUL EARTHQUAKE,

AND THE PRESENT

SITUATION of PUBLICK AFFAIRS,

BEFORE HIS GRACE

WILLIAM DUKE of DEVONSHIRE,

Lord Lieutenant General and General Gouverneur of

I R E L A N D ;

AND THE

LORDS SPIRITUAL AND TEMPORAL

In PARLIAMENT Assembled.

By *ARTHUR* Lord Bishop of *DOWN* and *CONNOR*.

Published by His GRACE's Special Command, and by Order of
the HOUSE of LORDS.

D U B L I N :

Printed for JOSEPH LEATHLEY, in *Dame-street*.

MDCCCLVI.

Die Lunæ 9^o Die Februarii, 1756^o.

IT is Ordered by the Lords Spiritual and Temporal in Parliament assembled, That the Thanks of this House shall be, and are hereby given to the Lord Bishop of *DOWN* and *CONNOR*, for his Sermon preached before this House at *CHRIST-CHURCH* the Sixth Instant ; and his Lordship is hereby desired to Print and Publish the same : And that no Person do presume to print the said Sermon, but such as his Lordship shall appoint.

Hen. Baker Sterne, Cler' Parliamentor.



In the twenty-sixth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet ISAIAH, and Part of the ninth and tenth Verses.

When thy Judgments are in the Earth, the Inhabitants of the World will learn Righteousness.

Let Favour be shewed to the Wicked, yet will He not learn Righteousness : in the Land of Uprightness will he deal unjustly, and will not behold the Majesty of the Lord.

THERE is something in the Nature of Man so heedless and inconsiderate, that without frequent Admonition, the plainest and greatest Objects of his Interest and Happiness would pass unnoticed by him : If you convince him of the most important Truths, for the present he will rest satisfied with them ; but they will have no permanent Operation on his Mind, any Passion, any Trifle will suddenly withdraw his Attention from the Contemplation of them, and perhaps make him totally forget that he had ever learn'd them : This Heedlessness extends itself to every *Branch* of our moral Duty ;
but

but in no one Instance more strongly appears, than in our Inattention to those capital and *radical* Truths, of the Being of a God, and of His Providence.

IN Compassion of these Defects (produced in us by the Fall of our first Parents) it pleased the Divine Wisdom and Mercy to send frequent Prophets and Messengers to his People, to exhort, to warn, to threaten them into a Sense of their Dependance and Duty; when these Exhortations came at length to be received as Words of Course, spoken by Persons, whose Office it was to pronounce them, *then* indeed a sharper Remedy became necessary, and those whom the soft Voice of Reason would not persuade, were at last awakened by the *Terrors of the Lord*: *When he slew them*, says the Psalmist, *then they sought him, and they returned and enquired early after God: and they remembered that God was their Rock, and the high God their Redeemer.*

Psalm
78. 34.

By this Representation of the State of our Minds, it appears, that Visitations from Heaven are real Mercies to Mankind: The Destruction wrought by them (though sometimes great and terrible to the suffering Individuals) yet bears but a small Proportion to those numerous Bodies of Men, who *are*, or ought to be, made better by the Example. They are not therefore to be looked upon as a wanton Exercise of Power in an angry Being, regardless of the Sufferings of his Creatures; nor yet are they to be accounted Defects in the original Constitution of Things, from which such great Calamities are naturally produced; but they are the wise Regulations of a beneficent Parent enforcing Obedience to His Laws for salutary Ends and Purposes: For, *when his Judgments are in the Earth, the Inhabitants*

Inhabitants of the World will learn Righteousness; that is, will be recalled to a conscientious Discharge of all religious and moral Duties. By *this* Part of my Text, we learn the *Use* and *Intent* of the Judgments of God.

ARE we then such Children as that Correction is necessary to preserve us from falling? Would not the manly and generous Principle of Gratitude, amidst Bounties poured upon us by our Maker, be sufficient to keep us steady and upright in our Observance of Him? It would and does to ingenuous Minds; but we are not *all* of so happy a Disposition: For in the remaining Part of my Text, it is with great Truth said; *Let Favour be shewed to the Wicked, yet will he not learn Righteousness; in the Land of Uprightness will he deal unjustly, and will not behold the Majesty of the Lord.* Or, in other Words, in the Land where the purest Religion is taught, and the Laws are the most favourable to Liberty and Justice, yet as long as he feels himself happy, he will be guilty of Oppression to his Neighbour, and remain unmindful of the Majesty of the Lord. *This* therefore shews the Occasion and seeming Necessity of God's Judgments. As I cannot pursue a better Method in this Discourse than by following the Order laid down by the Prophet in my Text; I shall in the first Place, consider the *Nature, Use and Intent* of the Judgments of God: And in the second Place, I shall shew the Occasion, and (if such a Word may be applied to the Divine Nature) the seeming Necessity of them.

THE Judgments of God, in their general Sense are His righteous and final Decrees; and all His Laws, Statutes and Ordinances are comprehended under that Term; *I* ^{Psalms} _{119. 102.} *have not departed from thy Judgments for thou hast taught*
B me;

me; says the Psalmist: But they are often used in Scripture in a more limited Sense, and mean the Execution of such of the Decrees of God as inflict Chastisements on Mankind for Disobedience to his Will plainly signified to them.

rov.
9. 29.

Judgments are prepared for Scorners, and Stripes for the Back of Fools. And *this* I take to be the Meaning of them in my Text: And shall use them in that Acceptation thro' the whole of this Discourse.

WHEN God was pleased to be the personal and visible Director and Gouvernour of Men, when he gave them Laws, sometimes by his own Mouth, sometimes by the Mouths of Prophets whose Mission and Authority were known and acknowledged, *then*, he punished Disobedience to those Laws in a quick, exemplary, and miraculous Manner, as in the Destruction of the *Egyptians*, the three Days Pestilence upon *Israel*, the fearful Example made of *Korah* and his Company, and many other Instances in Holy Writ. But as his Will is not *now* in so extraordinary a Manner declared to us, neither is the Transgression of it so extraordinarily punished; there is *now* no Mark set upon his Correction by which we can clearly know, *when*, and for what particular Crime it is inflicted; *This* is left to our own Reason and Observation to discern and discover. He has interwoven in the Fabrick of Nature, the Causes of dreadful Calamities to the Race of Man, which by his special Providence, he sometimes directs in their Operation, to answer his wise and beneficent Purposes; but He has left us no Rule, by which we can with Precision, mark the Bounds of His common and extraordinary Providence, and discern when he punishes in the regular Course, and when by a special Commission. Most
of

of the Evils which private Persons suffer, and some of those with which Nations are afflicted, are the necessary Result of Folly and Vice, and may be looked upon as the natural Execution of a Sentence originally pronounced against the Transgressors of particular Laws: And therefore may generally be avoided by a prudent Care and Observance of our Duty; such are Diseases, Poverty, Disobedience of Children, with many others, and amongst these, the Destruction and Miseries attending War may be reckoned; for they are usually the Offspring of the Pride, Resentment, Avarice and Bigotry of Mankind. These, however, are sometimes made Use of by Providence as Instruments of Correction, and the Sword is by the Prophet *Ezekiel*, accounted as one of the four sore Judgments of God. But there are other Calamities incident to all the Inhabitants of the Earth; great and extensive in Distresses which they create, which can have no Connection with the Passions of Men, which no human Prudence can foresee nor Caution nor Power prevent; I mean, Contagion in the Air, and Convulsions in the Earth: These therefore may more properly be looked upon as the immediate Acts of God. We see, that in this World, as far as the general System is concerned, there is an amazing Order, Regularity and Exactness observed, thro' succeeding Generations, in the Revolutions of the Earth and of the Planets; but upon this our Globe, where Respect is principally had to the Gouvernement and Welfare of Mankind, we see that the Seeds of Disorder and Uncertainty are sown amongst the Elements themselves. So that, as far as the unsearchable Counsels of God are to be examined into by us, we may suppose, that He has left these, *not*
Imperfections,

Imperfections, but wise Regulations in the Order of Nature, that the giddy and capricious Race of Men may occasionally, by them, be brought to a serious Attention to their Duty, and be reanimated with a Spirit of Religion. Thus far then we may safely proceed in searching after the true Use and Intent of the Judgments of God: In Cases of Distress, where *human Assistance* fails, it is natural to seek for Aid from Heaven: And it is a gracious Intention of the wise Contriver of all Things, to have so ordered Matters, as that we should be frequently admonished of our Weakness and Dependence: *In their Afflictions*, says God, *they will seek me early*. Or, in the Words of my Text, *When thy Judgments are in the Earth, the Inhabitants of the World will learn Righteousness*.

I promised in the second Place, to shew the Occasion and seeming Necessity of God's Judgments as express'd in my Text: The Occasion of them appears in *this*, that some Persons *deal unjustly even in the Land of Uprightness, and will not behold the Majesty of the Lord*. Here is comprehended, the Breach of every moral and religious Duty: The apparent *Necessity* of them, is shewn, by declaring that bad Men are not to be wrought upon by Kindness: *Let Favour be shewed to the Wicked, yet will he not learn Righteousness*. This is an unhappy but known Truth, and is a clear Vindication of the Goodness and Mercy of our Maker, in permitting, nay, in *inflicting* Chastisements on an unthinking and ungrateful Race, who make so perverse an Use of their Freedom of Will and Action. Without Doubt, he might have so ordered the Elements of which this Earth is composed, as that they should uniformly and constantly produce Plenty, Health
and

and Safety to all it's Inhabitants, but his Divine Wisdom foresaw that such a Disposition would be by no Means fitted to our Passions and Humours. If we had no Fear over us, except what human Laws create, *they* are found very unequal to the enforcing of the Practice of moral Duties; and amidst a Profusion made loathsome by Satiety, we should be unmindful of our purest and most exalted Happiness, the Knowledge and Admiration and Adoration of God.

THE *Nature* then of the Judgments of God, are any Afflictions with which Men are visited; the *Occasion* of them are the Vices of Men; the *Use* and *Intent*, to remove those Vices; the *Necessity*, that they are not to be removed without them: Would to God, they might always be removed by the first Notices of them; *then* the Prophet's Complaint were unnecessary: *The People turneth not unto him that smiteth them, neither do they seek the Lord of Hosts: For every one is an Hypocrite, and an evil Doer, and every Mouth speaketh Folly: But mark the Consequence, for all this, His Anger is not turned away, but His Hand is stretched out still. He will cut off from Israel Head and Tail, Branch and Rush in one Day.* Let us reflect a little how any of the foregoing Observations may be applicable to *us* in our present Circumstances, and to the Occasion of this solemn Meeting.

WE are now, in all Appearance, on the Point of entering into a War with a powerful, ambitious and inveterate Enemy: These Nations are the principal Obstruction to his extensive Views; he has met with many a Check from the Spirit of our Monarchs; the Virtue which true Religion inspires, the Courage arising from Liberty, the Wisdom and Harmony of our Counsels, and the Resources fur-

nished by Industry and Commerce : And whilst these Virtues were strenuously exerted, we have usually been favoured with the Blessing of God on a just Cause. We have therefore Reason to expect that the whole Power of their Empire will be applied, all the Arts of Subtilty put in Practice to weaken, to disarm, to destroy us.

THERE is no Occasion to lay before you the wretched Effects of War, particularly to a commercial People ; tho' by the Goodness of our God, they are better known to us from the Relation of others, than from our own Experience. However, there are some left amongst us, who can well recollect how sore a Visitation it is to any People, and particularly it is to be feared, that it would be prosecuted in this Kingdom with Circumstances of uncommon Severity. Is it then the Passion of Fear which the Apprehension of this Danger should raise in us? No, but Humiliation, Vigilance and Courage. If we look upon it as the threatening Hand of Justice, on Account of our Infidelity, Hypocrisy, Injustice, total Dissolution of Manners, and Contempt of every noble and virtuous Consideration, we should timely avert the Blow, by an early and serious Repentance ; we should look up to the *Lord of Hosts*, who can order the Success of Battles, *especially at Sea*, by infinite Ways imperceptible by us ; we should not rest satisfied with the *Form* of a solemn Meeting, but we should in earnest *sanctifie a Fast, by turning every one from his evil Way, and from the Violence that is in their Hands : then let the Priests the Ministers of the Lord weep between the Porch and the Altar, and let them say, Spare thy People, O Lord, and give not thine Heritage to Reproach, that the Heathen should rule over them : then will the Lord be jealous for his Land, and pity his People.* To put no Confidence

dence in God is *Ingratitude*, to trust *entirely* to Him, is Presumption: Having therefore humbled ourselves under His mighty Hand, our Vigilance and our Courage should be quickened against an artful and daring Enemy. If he thinks that our Virtue and Fortitude are lost, thro' Corruption of Principle; if he thinks that we are weary of Liberty, having never (since the coming of the glorious King *William*) felt the Yoke of Tyranny; if he apprehends that all Religion with us is only *nominal*, and every Species of Worship equally indifferent; that there is a swelling in the Minds of the People, which by the Breath of ill-designing Men may be blown into a greater Comotion; if *these*, I say, are his Encouragements, we can quickly disappoint these Hopes, by a steady and vigorous Union and Zeal for God and Liberty; and we shall have little to fear from his stoutest Efforts, if we can obtain Pardon from our Redeemer, and exert our Strength with a Resolution becoming the Importance of the Cause, we have the best-grounded Hopes of Safety under the Protection of a great and good Monarch, and a wise and active and hitherto successful Administration.

THE Danger from the Approach of our Enemies, tho' sufficient to make us serious, is yet not near so alarming as another of God's Judgments, which is now in the Earth; a Judgment so dreadful, so wide-extended, as if *all the Foundations of the Earth were out of Course*. The Interposition of Providence in directing the Affections and Wills of Men, has been doubted by some, as being thought by them to be inconsistent with the Gouvernement of rational and moral Agents, from whom an Account of their Actions is required: *Such* Persons will imagine, that War is the natural Result of the Passions of Mankind, uninfluenced
and

and unconstrained from Above, and therefore that it may be either undertaken or avoided at their Pleasure; and that all its Consequences are determined merely by the Movements of the human Will. But few, even the most prophane, (who admitted the Being of a God,) ever doubted, but that the Elements of this World, were under His immediate Direction: And by His handling of them even *Heathen* Nations were often struck with Awe and Astonishment; for when the Right Hand of God touched the Hills, (I know before whom I am speaking)

----- *Tum maxima Motu*

*Terra tremit, fugere Feræ, & mortalia Corda
Per Gentes humilis stravit pavor.*

IF ever Men's Hearts were struck with Solemnity and Terror at any of the irregular Workings of Nature, if ever Pardon and Mercy from God were solicited for by Repentance, at the strong Appearances of his Displeasure, the present Occasion calls for it, for never since the Days of *Noah*, by any Records of History, did such various and fearful Destruction follow so sudden a Stroke of His Hand. Let us draw a Veil over those Scenes of Misery and Distraction which must in *all* Places have followed the Execution of this Judgment, as being too affecting for a Representation; let us only think, what in *one* Place must have been the Feelings, the Amazement and Horror of Men in that solemn Moment.

BEHOLD a great and opulent People, the *crowning City*, whose Merchants were Princes, whose Traffickers were the honourable of the Earth; imagine them meditating Increase of Wealth by new Schemes of Commerce, or perhaps

haps fixing Engagements of Pleasure ; *saying to their Soul*, ^{Luke 12. 19.} *(in a serene and clear Morning) Soul, thou hast much Goods laid up for many Years, take thine Ease, eat, drink and be merry :* Behold, in an Instant, all their Property buried before them in the Earth ; their dearest Kindred covered in the Ruins ; their whole Government threatned with Dissolution ; and the general Judgment expected. *What* ^{Psalms 114. 5.} *ailed thee, O thou Sea, that thou fleddest, thou Jordan, that thou wast driven back ? Ye Mountains, that ye skipped like Rams : And ye little Hills, like young Sheep ! Tremble thou Earth, at the Presence of the Lord, at the Presence of the God of Jacob.* In our Meditations upon this unhappy Incident, we should be very careful of presuming to impute it to any particular Crime or Error of the suffering People ; such Reflections as are ill-grounded, they are insulting, they are cruel, particularly when applied to a friendly and very valuable Neighbour. Tho' we know the general Occasions of the Judgments of God ; yet the precise Occasion of any particular Judgment is unsearchable by us ; many of His Proceedings arising from Grounds inaccessible to our Apprehension : And when we set ourselves up for Judges of His Actions, we are apt always to measure Things by their Agreement to our Opinions, Expectations and Affections. It will be more to our Purpose, if we take it as a gracious Warning to ourselves, and quickly reform our Lives with Humility and Thanksgiving. If we do not ; *Lord, when thy Hand is lifted up, they will not see : but they shall see and be ashamed.* ^{Isaiah 26. 11.}

THERE may possibly be found *some*, who will not admit Providence to have had any Share in this Transaction : Who, tho' they allow us to be accountable Creatures, yet think that an Account will not be required till the Day of

D

general

general Judgment ; that Nature continues *on*, its own Operations, in a slow and steady Pace, by unerring Laws originally impress'd upon Matter ; and that no Virtue or Penitence of Men can avert these Motions of the Elements, as no Power can withstand them. It is very true, that the complete Determination of our Cause, and the final Settlement of the Account, is reserved for another Life ; and this should teach us Humility and Resignation, under the seeming Inequality of the Distribution of Rewards and Punishments here. It is also true, that there are many special Notices given in this Life, that we may be careful in preparing Matters for a favourable Issue. Now whether we think, that *Matter* is always actuated by original Laws unalterable ; or whether we believe that it has sometimes impressed upon it the immediate Finger of God, the Consequences, with Regard to our own Conduct, when Danger is near at Hand, should be the same. If it *can* be removed, it must be done by Repentance and the imploring of Pardon and Mercy : If it *cannot* be removed, but that we must perish under it, we should then prepare ourselves to meet it, before our Account is closed ; and here the same Affections of Sorrow, Repentance and Humiliation, will be necessary. All *this* may perhaps be admitted, and yet another Resource is left, another Apology to cover the Unwillingness which giddy and vicious Men have to be thoughtful and repent : It may be said, that the Distance between *us* and that lamented City is great, and the Danger now over by a Cessation of Earthquakes. Before we can receive any Rest from the Operation of this Palliative, three Points must be taken for granted, none of which are sufficiently founded on Truth : It is first presumed, that the Destruction was wrought entirely by natural Causes, and

and that God had no Share in the immediate Direction of it; in the second Place, it is supposed that the Heavings and labouring Convulsions of the Earth are for the present quieted, which by no Means appears; and thirdly, that the Distance between us and the principal Efforts of Nature, is so great, that we need not be under any Alarm: *This* is the most unphilosophical of *all*: When we are measuring the Works of the Almighty, and consider the immense Extent and Magnitude of those glorious Luminaries that surround us, (which are yet probably but a very small Part of the Creation) to talk of *any* Distance as great upon this Globe, betrays a low and confined Imagination: There *may* be a Force within the Earth capable of dissipating every Particle of it at the same Instant of Time, with as much Ease as a Bubble is burst with Air. How little Dependance there is upon Safety from Distance of Place, we should be convinced of, from the Experience of our own Times; for the most destructive Earthquakes which *our* Days have seen, were felt on the four Quarters of the Globe; One, on the furthest Coast of *America*; One in *Persia*, and now in *Africk*, and most fatally in *Europe*: And this Island was in some Measure affected by it. *Where* the Sword of Justice will strike next, we know not. *Trust ye then in the Lord for ever: for in the Lord* Isaiah 26. 14. *Jehovah is everlasting Strength; for He bringeth down them that dwell on high, the lofty City he layeth it low even to the Ground; He bringeth it even to the Dust, the Foot shall tread it down, even the Feet of the Poor and the Steps of the Needy.*

I HOPE we are all by this Time satisfied, that we are bound by all the Ties of Prudence as well as Duty; seriously to take the Alarm, and when God's Judgments are
Abroad

Abroad and near at Hand, to endeavour to avert them by Humility and Prayer, or be prepared to receive them with a becoming and steady Resignation: especially when such a Preparation will be our surest Pledge for Safety and Victory. And as Humility to God is the proper Forerunner of Thanksgiving, let us in the next Place pour forth our most grateful Acknowledgments for his many wonderful and unmerited Mercies to these Kingdoms, particularly to *this*, which by the Luxury and Folly of its Inhabitants, has few Ressources left, to enable it to support itself under any pressing Calamity.

BUT if our Sins call for Vengeance; if nothing but *feeling*, will make us wise, and that God shall find it necessary to chastise us with one of the Instruments of Correction now in his Hand; for my own Part I should clearly accept of King *David's* Choice. *Let us now fall into the Hand of the Lord, (for his Mercies are great) and let me not fall into the Hand of Man.*

^{2 Sam.}
^{24. 14.}

Now to the *one* Eternal God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, be all Honour and Power everlasting. Amen.



F I N I S.

